(b)if so, by when; and

(c) by when the resumption of trade between the two countries and the issuing of visas for tourists is likely to begin?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) and (b) Following Prime Minister's initiative in April, extending once again the hand of friendship to Pakistan, Government have adopted a step-by-step approach to normalize diplomatic and other links between the two countries. Both countries have appointed High Commissioners and the Delhi-Lahore has been resumed with effect from July 11, Technical level discussion for resumption of civil aviation is scheduled for August 27-28, 2003. There have also been important exchanges in the context of business, cultural and people to people contacts. India would move ahead in a step-by-step manner building on the successes achieved and the confidence generated.

(c) There has been no restriction on trade with Pakistan although Pakistan continues to be highly restrictive in its trade with India, and does not grant MFN status. Pakistanis are issued visitor visa to visit India and there has been no restriction on issue of visas to Pakistani nationals who are found eligible, and visas are normaly granted after pre-verification.

Death of Indian Officers

† 2648. PROF. R.B.S. VARMA: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) the details of officials working in the Ministry of External Affairs who had died in harness while posted abroad;

(b) whether Government have provided jobs to the dependents of the deceased on compassionate grounds;

(c) if so, the number of such dependents who have been provided jobs on compassionate grounds;

(d) the number of applications for compassionate grounds pending for the approvaJ of Government; and

(e) whether Government holds positive views on such applications?

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† Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) During the last three years *i.e.* 2000-2003, 14 officials working in the Ministry of External Affairs died in harness while posted abroad.

(b) and (c) The Ministry provides jobs to the dependents of the deceased on compassionate grounds keeping in view the number of vacancies allocated to this category under Direct Recruitment quota, and also financial guidelines that have been prescribed by the Planning Commission. During the last three years, the Ministry received applications from the dependents of 10 officials who had died while posted abroad. These applications were considered in accordance with the existing guidelines on filling of posts on compassionate grounds, and none of them were found to be eligible.

(d) At present, there are 17 eligible cases of compassionate appointments pending with the Ministry.

(e) Appointment on compassionate grounds to a dependent/family member of a Government Servant who died in Service are considered sympathetically, and jobs are provided to eligible candidates whenever vacancies become available in accordance with the existing Government rules and guidelines.

POK Prime Minister's statement regarding Indo-Pak talks

2649. PROF. SAIF-UD-DIN SOZ: Will the Minister of EXTERNAL AFFAIRS be pleased to state :

(a) whether Government have come across statement made by the POK Prime Minister that the armed struggle would intensify if Kashmiris were ignored during the parleys between India and Pakistan; and

(b) if so, whether Government conveyed any reaction to Pakistan on such remarks?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI DIGVIJAY SINGH): (a) From time to time, Pakistani leaders and those in POK have made statements contrary to the Simla Agreement and international norms and have attempted to justify their sponsorship of cross border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir as "legitimate armed struggle"